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Please accept this written testimony in support of the spirit and intent of ***Raised Bill No. 1054: An Act Concerning Students with Dyslexia***. I am writing today to ask that additional consideration be given to part f of this proposed legislation, which states that any teacher preparation program leading to professional certification shall incorporate into the requirements of the student major and concentration not less than twelve semester credit hours or one and a half credits in the detection and recognition of, and evidence-based interventions for, students with Dyslexia. Having been a professor for the past 15 years, in both Special Education and Reading, I am strongly urging the committee to reframe the language of Raised Bill 1054 to require Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) to dedicate a three-credit course to the detection, recognition of, and evidence-based interventions for students with Dyslexia. This equates to approximately 36 contact hours of training.

Connecticut is presently in the midst of refining teacher licensure requirements for all licensure programs: as such, this is the ideal time for the legislature to require a dedicated course in Dyslexia screening, assessment, and intervention. At this time, the proposed licensure requirements for Elementary classroom educators seeks to increase the amount of preparation that candidates receive in reading to a total of nine credits; however, there is no reference to Dyslexia in these proposed regulations. Raised Bill 1054, as written, would make it possible for Institutions of Higher Education to “embed” reference to Dyslexia screening, assessment, and intervention into numerous courses in varied contexts. As written, Raised Bill 1054 would make it possible for example, for IHEs to dedicate one course meeting or online session in each of three separate required reading courses to Dyslexia. Embedding content in this manner is not appropriate when pre-service programs aim to develop candidates’ depth of knowledge on a given topic for the purpose of ensuring that they are able to apply this knowledge in meaningful contexts – namely, school settings.

Indeed, Connecticut’s proposed certification regulations for Special Educators and Remedial Reading and Remedial Language Arts Specialists are no stronger than those for Elementary Education: neither set of regulations references the training of these interventionists in Dyslexia screening, identification, or intervention practices. As such, it is feasible that Elementary Educators who wish to pursue advanced training in Special Education or Remedial Reading and Remedial Language Arts will be able to do so without ever engaging coursework that prepares them to screen, identify, and intervene on behalf of students with Dyslexia. At the very least, each of these groups of educators - General, Special, and Remedial- should be afforded the opportunity to engage a dedicated three-credit course. Failure to do so puts the burden on public school districts to continuously retrain incoming educators in matters pertaining to Dyslexia. With the addition of Dyslexia to Connecticut’s Individualized Education Plan, this is the reality of what districts are facing.

Again, I thank you for your continued efforts to support the needs of Connecticut’s children and educators. I hope that together, the legislature, Department of Education, and Institutes of Higher Education can collaborate to ensure the meaningful preparation of pre-service educators with regard to Dyslexia. It is my opinion that this begins with a dedicated, three-credit course for all of Connecticut’s educators.

Sincerely,

Jule McCombes-Tolis

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